
Government of the District of Columbia



Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

Testimony of

**Nicholas Majett
Acting Director**

on

***P.R. 19-0040
THE “DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
CONSUMER AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
NICHOLAS A. MAJETT CONFIRMATION
RESOLUTION OF 2011”***

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs
Yvette Alexander, Chairperson

March 17, 2011

Room 123
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004
11:00 A.M.

Good morning, Chairperson Alexander, members, and staff of the Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs. I am Nicholas Majett, Acting Director of the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. I'm here today to testify on my nomination to be Director of DCRA.

First, I would like thank Mayor Vincent Gray for nominating me to serve as Director. Second, I would like to thank those who have either testified or submitted written statements in support of my nomination.

I would like to share with you why I am uniquely qualified for this position, my vision for the agency, and what improvements I have made so far as the Acting Director.

My Background and Qualifications

I am a native Washingtonian, having been born in Ward 1 at Freedmen's Hospital (currently Howard University Hospital), graduated from Calvin Coolidge High School, and graduated from Howard University and Howard University School of Law. I spent most of my childhood and adulthood in Ward 4. Currently, I am a member in good standing of the District of Columbia Bar Association, where I serve as Co-Chair of the Steering Committee of the Bar's D.C. Affairs Section. I also serve on the Board of Directors for Joseph's House which is a non-profit organization located in Ward 1 serving the disadvantaged.

In 1984, I served as a Complaint Adjudicator for the U.S. Department of Commerce, where I was responsible for reviewing employee discrimination cases and drafting final decisions for the Commerce Secretary. In this capacity, I gained a working knowledge of employment discrimination matters. This experience has proven invaluable throughout my career and, in particular, it has assisted me in

avoiding potential discrimination cases against the District. As DCRA employs a large number of individuals, my experience in discrimination and similar cases is vital to staffing matters.

In 1985, I joined the D.C. Office of the Attorney General (formerly the Office of the Corporation Counsel) where my primary assignment was to represent the D.C. Office of Tax and Revenue. In 1990, I was appointed the Chief of the OTR Assessment Services Division, where I was responsible for bills issued to 180,000 real property owners, reviewing recorded deeds for accuracy, and overseeing the Homestead Division. The detailed analysis skills I developed are paramount to ensuring issues within DCRA are properly and expeditiously vetted and resolved.

I returned to OAG in 1991 and continued my public service career there for nearly 14 years. During that time, I handled hundreds of tax, civil, housing, and criminal cases. As an Assistant Attorney General, I also represented matters related to DCRA. In particular, I assisted in developing a 13-chapter curriculum for DCRA and trained 120 DCRA Inspectors, Investigators, and other staff on conducting legally-sufficient inspections and investigations.

In 2006, I was recruited to join DCRA as the Deputy Director for Inspections and Compliance. To properly oversee the division, I took several International Codes Council (ICC) courses for Residential and Property Maintenance and became proficient in each discipline. I also briefly served as the agency's Chairperson for the Construction Codes Coordinating Board, established by the Mayor to amend the District's construction codes. During my tenure as Deputy, I turned a lackluster Vacant Property Unit, which had an inventory of 600 properties, into a robust unit which currently has an inventory of some 3,400

properties and which in FY 2010 generated some \$19 million in property tax revenue.

Since being appointed by Mayor Gray as the agency's Acting Director, I have already launched several initiatives and enacted cost savings that will benefit the agency and the District. With both a legal and regulatory background, I am uniquely positioned and qualified to lead the agency forward and meet the challenges it faces.

My Vision for DCRA

DCRA's mission is to protect the health, safety, economic interests, and quality of life of the residents, businesses, and visitors in the District of Columbia. We do this by issuing business licenses and construction permits; conducting inspections; enforcing building, housing, and safety codes; and regulating land use and development.

Our most critical challenge in meeting our mission is to balance strong enforcement with excellent customer service. As a regulatory agency, this dynamic is not unique to DCRA.

My vision for DCRA is to streamline the business license and building permit processes in order to make it a much simpler experience for our customers. Under my leadership, I want DCRA to be viewed as a proficient and customer-friendly agency.

As Acting Director, one of my highest priorities is to make DCRA responsive to all our customers and stakeholders. We must meld customer service and business efficiencies into the complex regulatory frameworks we work with on

a daily basis. We also must simplify our processes and requirements, eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies, and make our services accessible in as many places and in as many ways as possible. And we must constantly aim to streamline processes, make extensive use of technology, and provide excellent customer service.

To further that goal, we recently launched the Small Business Resource Center which offers one-on-one business counseling and workshops specifically designed to assist small business owners and entrepreneurs with navigating the District's regulatory environment. We also have a Homeowner Center within our Permits Division which assists homeowners seeking to make repairs or renovations to their home.

Immediate Improvements and Long-Term Changes

Since being appointed Acting Director on January 3, 2011, I, along with my incredibly dedicated, highly motivated, and experienced staff, have made some immediate agency improvements and set out a vision for the agency.

For example:

- I have combined the positions of Chief Building Official and Permits Division Chief, so that the agency speaks with one voice when it comes to matters of building and housing code interpretation and compliance.
- We are exploring ways to simplify the process for those license categories requiring a building inspection before the issuance of a license. One way to accomplish this, for example, is to allow owners of one- and two-family rentals to “self certify” that their

housing units meet code requirements. The owners could then immediately obtain a business license, subject to a future housing inspection of the property.

- We are no longer requiring property owners to go through an onerous process to obtain elevator certificates. Previously, a property owner had to submit a Cleans Hands Certificate from OTR, a current basic business license, a Certificate of Occupancy, and an inspections report. We have since changed that to require an applicant to submit only an inspections report.
- We expect to launch a significantly updated online basic business license application system within the next several months.
- We are working to streamline the building permit process by establishing a one-stop center with all agencies' building plans reviewers in one location, rather than requiring applicants to visit several different locations throughout the District.
- We are continually increasing customer awareness by including more information on our website and reaching out to ANC Commissioners and community groups so that our customers understand exactly what we do. By better educating our customers, this will reduce their frustrations in contacting DCRA, only to find out that it's another agency that can assist them.
- We are re-visiting the current requirement that all DCRA Inspectors become ICC-certified in multiple disciplines, which, to date, has not proven totally successful. We have also begun the process of creating an apprenticeship program with Phelps

Vocational High School to get our students interested in jobs in the building and construction industry.

- We are working with the Office of Administrative Hearings to improve the Notice of Infraction process in order to simplify and streamline the resolution and collection of fines.
- And we are also continuing our regular meetings with stakeholders in the construction and building industry and the housing and tenant advocacy community.

I am very excited and highly motivated to serve as the agency's Director. I strongly believe that under the leadership of Mayor Gray and by partnering with both the Council and our customers, I and my team can continue the transformation of DCRA into a model urban regulatory agency. I am deeply honored to be nominated to lead an agency that is critical to the economic development and safety of the District, and I look forward to serving the District's residents, businesses, and visitors.

Chairperson Alexander, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.